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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Special meeting to mark sixty years of dispossession of Palestine refugees

Summary record of the first part* of the 309th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 20 June 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Badji ..... (Senegal)

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* The summary record of the second part of the meeting, to be reconvened in the afternoon, appears as document A/AC.183/SR.309 (Resumption 1).

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08-39616 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Statement by the Chairman

2. **The Chairman** announced that the meeting was open to the entire United Nations membership.

3. Sixty years had passed since the Arab-Israeli hostilities of 1948 which had led to the flight of some 800,000 Palestine refugees and the subsequent loss of their homeland, property and identity. Palestinians mourned the outcome of the war, referring to it as the catastrophe, or Nakba, a name that signified the tragic dispossession of the entire Palestinian people, not just that of refugees.

4. The United Nations had been involved with the conflict over Palestine since 1947. The issue of Palestine refugees remained a central aspect of the conflict, which must be resolved in order to ensure the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as enshrined in General Assembly resolution 3236 (XXIV). In its resolution 194 (III), paragraph 11, the General Assembly resolved "that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible".

5. The original Palestine refugees and their descendants, estimated to number more than 7 million, constituted the world's oldest and largest refugee population. Some one third of those refugees continue to live in camps in Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the Syrian Arab Republic. The living conditions of Palestine refugees were particularly deplorable in the Occupied Territory: refugees living in the West Bank had been subjected to the demolition of their homes and confiscation of their land, which had been set aside for the exclusive use of Israeli settlers. Some 38 per cent of the West Bank, which had once been intended to form part of a Palestinian State, was inaccessible to Palestinians. Furthermore, numerous checkpoints impeded their freedom of movement and had a negative impact on socio-economic development. Settlement activity and construction of the separation wall also persisted, in contravention of international law, Security Council resolutions and the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

6. As a result of the isolation of the Gaza Strip, the humanitarian situation of its residents, of whom two thirds were refugees, had worsened considerably. The closure of crossings and other Israeli measures amounted to collective punishment and hindered the population's access to such basic commodities as food, fuel and medical equipment, thereby aggravating poverty and unemployment. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had had to temporarily suspend its operations for lack of fuel and was currently delivering a significantly reduced quantity of goods to Gazans, at least 80 per cent of whom were fully dependent on food aid and humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, a large number of civilians had been killed in the unrelenting Israeli incursions. The international community should hold Israel fully responsible for the welfare of the refugees in the territories it continued to occupy.

7. The main purpose of UNRWA was the direct provision of primary education, health care, and social services to Palestine refugees in the Middle East. The Agency also ran a microfinance programme and built new homes for refugees, in addition to replacing those damaged by Israeli forces. During a visit to two refugee camps in northern Jordan, he had witnessed first-hand the work done by UNRWA and the crucial role of the host countries in making that work possible. He thanked the Commissioner-General and the dedicated staff of UNRWA for their efforts, and urged donors to continue to make generous contributions to the Agency, because its activities were often restrained by underfinancing.

8. The final document of the United Nations International Conference on Palestine Refugees convened by the Committee in Paris in April 2008 had been distributed by the Secretariat.

9. The Committee continued to support the Middle East peace process based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the two-State solution endorsed by Security Council resolution 1515 (2003). It had also welcomed the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and the joint

understanding reached at the Annapolis Conference, and called on the parties to implement them.

10. The Committee had consistently urged both parties to intensify political negotiations and action to improve conditions for Israelis and Palestinians on the ground; it commended regional partners for finding political solutions in support of the peace process, and stressed that permanent status negotiations leading to a long-overdue peace settlement must focus on borders, settlements, Jerusalem and refugees, whose sheer numbers made them a significant presence in the region. It was morally and legally incumbent upon the United Nations and the international community to find a just solution to the question of Palestine.

Statement by Palestine

11. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine), noting that the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba coincided with international observance of World Refugee Day, expressed the hope that a just resolution would be found to the plight of all refugees. Delivering the statement by the President of the Palestinian National Authority, he said that the Palestinian people continued to struggle for its inalienable rights, including its right to self-determination and right to return. Notwithstanding decades of oppression and upheaval, it remained committed to its goal of establishing an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, its sole, legitimate representative.

12. After many decades, the people of Palestine, tragically, remained stateless and oppressed as a result of the 1948 Nakba, which had cost them their homes, properties, heritage and homeland. More than half of them lived in exile as refugees, while the remainder, who lived in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, many of whom were also refugees, were subjected to human rights violations, the trampling of their dignity and the disintegration of their society.

13. In the face of poverty, repeated displacement and conflict, three generations of Palestine refugees, whose situation constituted the largest and longest-standing refugee question in the world, continued to await fulfilment of their right to return, as well as just compensation for their losses and suffering. Had Israel chosen to abide by international law and comply with United Nations resolutions, in accordance with its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, the tragedy of the Palestine refugees would have been justly resolved years earlier. However, Israel continued to deny them the right to return to their ancestral homeland, even as it implemented a so-called law of return that permitted the immigration of any Jewish person from anywhere in the world. Israel also refused to assume responsibility for the plight of Palestine refugees.

14. UNRWA had played a crucial role in alleviating the refugees' suffering by providing them with essential assistance, protecting them in times of conflict and safeguarding their rights. He reiterated his Government's gratitude to the Commissioner-General and staff of UNRWA for their tireless efforts, and also expressed its appreciation for the support extended to the refugees, both directly and through UNRWA, by the host Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and the donor community.

15. It was regrettable that the Palestinian people continued to be denied their national rights because of Israel's flagrant disrespect for international law, manifest in its commission of systematic human rights violations and war crimes against Palestinian civilians, including killing, maiming, imprisoning, displacing and collectively punishing them, as well as destroying their properties, infrastructure and lands. Israel had pursued and continued to pursue with impunity illegal and repressive policies against the Palestinian people, with the aim of de facto annexation of large areas of its land, which it had occupied unlawfully since 1967.

16. In contravention of international law, Israel had been conducting a massive colonization campaign in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, illegally building and expanding settlements and the separation wall, which was intended to entrench and protect the settlements. The purpose of settlement colonization in and around occupied East Jerusalem was to further obstruct Palestinian access to the city and physically sever it from the rest of the Territory. Hundreds of thousands of Israeli settlers had been illegally transferred to settlements and settlement outposts in the Territory, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and its First Additional Protocol. Israel also continued to confiscate Palestinian land and destroy Palestinian homes and properties, which, along with the imposition of a permit regime and hundreds of checkpoints aimed at restricting Palestinian movement,

had led to the displacement of yet more civilians, the separation of Palestinian cities and towns and the socio-economic devastation of entire communities. All such illegal Israeli practices were altering the demographic composition and character of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and destroying its contiguity and integrity, gravely undermining the prospects for achieving the two-State solution on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map.

17. The international community had a duty to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions and compel Israel to abide by all of its legal obligations; it must therefore condemn the illegal Israeli practices and act in concert to bring about their complete and immediate cessation. It must also intensify its efforts to address serious obstacles to the stated goals of the peace process, namely, an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory; the establishment of the State of Palestine, a just solution to the Palestine refugee question that was in accordance with resolution 194 (III); and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

18. After 60 long years of conflict, no effort should be spared to put an end to the suffering and loss of both peoples. Only a fair settlement of the question of Palestine based on international law and United Nations resolutions could end the Arab-Israeli conflict and bring about regional peace and stability. The Palestinian people and its leadership remained committed to achieving their legitimate national rights through the peace process; he therefore urged all concerned parties, including the Quartet, to promote the process renewed at Annapolis and the opportunity created by the Arab Peace Initiative, and support negotiations leading to a final peace settlement.

19. He reiterated his people's gratitude for international solidarity with the just cause of Palestine; indeed, the international community's political, moral, financial and humanitarian support had been vital to sustaining Palestinian resilience and steadfastness in the face of so much adversity. In that connection, the United Nations, which had a permanent responsibility to address the issue of Palestine until it was justly resolved in all its aspects, including the refugee question, deserved special recognition for its assistance to the Palestinian people, including, inter alia, through UNRWA and many other agencies. The efforts of the Committee, along with those of the Division for Palestinian Rights and other United Nations bodies, aimed at drawing attention to the plight of the Palestinian people and promoting the realization of its inalienable rights, were also worthy of note. The Palestinian leadership would continue to seek international support for a peaceful settlement, in the hope that a free and independent Palestine would one day join the family of nations.

20. **The Chairman** said that the Committee extended its respect and solidarity to Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, during what were very trying times for the Palestinian people.

Statement by the Director of the UNRWA Liaison Office in New York

21. **Mr. Whitley** (UNRWA) said that reconstruction of the destroyed Nahr al-Bared refugee camp in northern Lebanon was the most ambitious project undertaken by UNRWA in its 60-year history, and its implementation would carry implications that extended beyond the plight of the 30,000 refugees who had fled the camp during the fierce fighting in the summer of 2007.

22. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, of the 10 million people worldwide who identified themselves as Palestinian, 6 million were refugees, constituting the largest and longest-standing refugee group in the world, and a very high percentage had suffered forced displacement. A total of 4.5 million refugees were registered with UNRWA, in line with the Agency's definition of those persons entitled to its services, namely, those who could prove residency in British Mandate Palestine between 1946 and 1948 and who had lost their homes and means of livelihood, along with their descendants.

23. By dint of hard work and a thirst for education, most refugees had become able to support themselves and their families, and only 8 per cent of them were classified as persons unable to do so and therefore in need of relief aid, contrary to the myth of a desperate reservoir of Palestinian refugees kept in a state of dependency in order to swamp Israel one day with a tidal wave of returnees. While the international donor community and the refugee host authorities had demonstrated laudable steadfastness, the refugees

deserved particular credit for their yearning for self-improvement, which, nevertheless, did not imply surrender of their desire for acknowledgement of their rights by Israel and the international community.

24. Over the years, the Agency's activities had evolved from those of an emergency relief organization mandated to provide essential services in the aftermath of the 1948 and 1967 wars to those of a human development agency working to provide refugees with access to adequate work, higher education, start-up capital and medical treatment for diseases common to developed societies; that evolution reflected the changing needs of the refugee communities. UNRWA was currently grappling with expensive, large-scale camp improvement schemes; entrenched poverty resulting from socio-economic exclusion and chronic mental illness; and stress caused by poor living conditions in overcrowded camp areas.

25. That the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights coincided with the commemoration of six decades of the Palestinian Nakba attested to the international community's collective failure to meaningfully defend human dignity for Palestinians or achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East that included a durable solution to the refugee's plight. The associated effects of displacement and exile from their ancestral lands and their continued struggle to survive were manifested in their daily routine, particularly in the West Bank, where the illegal so-called separation barrier, together with over 600 checkpoints and physical obstacles to movement, reinforced Palestinians' sense of helplessness and loss of control over their own destiny.

26. In Gaza, the same sense of being pawns in a larger political game was keenly felt by many, amidst the devastation caused by cruel policies of blockade and collective punishment. UNRWA fervently hoped that the recent lull in the cycle of violence affecting the Gaza Strip and neighbouring parts of Israel would permit a reversal of the downward spiral witnessed for many months and a resumption of the many essential development projects that had been put on hold.

27. Tragically, violations by the occupying Power of clear provisions of international law underscored Palestinians' sense of exclusion from recourse to justice and protection under the international system, to which the United Nations was central. As the instrument of the international community's continued concern for the well-being of the Palestine refugees, the Agency had a duty to defend, protect and promote their rights and ensure that their needs were met and concerns heard. UNRWA urged all stakeholders to involve the refugee population, which has a community with a legitimate vested interest in a just and durable settlement of the conflict, in the peace talks, because their participation could only enhance the legitimacy of the outcome and help ensure its acceptance.

28. **The Chairman** said that the steadfast commitment of UNRWA, to Palestine refugees over the years had made the Agency the face of the United Nations in the region.

Statements by United Nations Members and Observers

29. **Mr. Benítez Versón** (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the refugee question had been and would continue to be priority issues for the Movement. The international community must redouble its efforts to peacefully and justly resolve the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including the plight of Palestine refugees, in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. Immediate action was imperative because the Palestinian people had suffered greatly and waited too long for justice and freedom, and the passage of so many years had only compounded the problem and its impact on the region and beyond.

30. The Non-Aligned Movement deeply regretted that the Palestinian people, which had been subjected to over 40 years of brutal Israeli military occupation, continued to be denied its fundamental human rights. The Movement renewed its call for an end to the unlawful siege of Gaza and the collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population there. Taking note of the recently established truce, he hoped that it would bring an end to the cycle of violence that had extended to the West Bank, and that border crossings in Gaza would soon be opened in order to facilitate the movement of persons and goods and thereby alleviate the dire humanitarian crisis.

31. The Movement reiterated its concern at the deteriorating political, economic, social and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory caused by the human rights violations and

war crimes committed by Israel, and stressed the need to end the illegal Israeli occupation of all the Arab territories it had seized in 1967 and establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In several multilateral forums, the non-aligned countries had strongly condemned the illegal and deliberate Israeli policies and practices aimed at altering the demographic composition and character of the Palestinian lands, thus facilitating their de facto annexation.

32. UNRWA had been a vital source of humanitarian assistance and support for Palestine refugees throughout the many years of suffering and crises that they had endured, providing protection during times of conflict and preserving their rights. The Movement also recognized the significant contribution made by the host Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, other Arab countries that hosted Palestine refugees and the donor community.

33. The mandate entrusted to UNRWA, which had been carried out with the long-standing support of the international community, must be extended until a just solution to the Palestine refugee question had been reached on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Against the background of the current dire situation, the Movement reaffirmed the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the Palestine question until it was resolved in all its aspects on the basis of international law. In order to redress the historic injustice imposed upon the Palestinian people, the Movement would continue to contribute to the attainment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the relevant United Nations resolutions.

34. **Mr. Amil** (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said that hopes for peace in Palestine had been dashed repeatedly by Israel's prolonged and illegal occupation of Arab territories and its excessive use of intimidation and force. The Muslim world had been disappointed by the great Powers' partiality and unwillingness to promote just and durable solutions to several crises in the Middle East.

35. Sixty years after the Nakba, the unresolved issue of Palestine continued to pose a major threat to regional and international peace and security. The Islamic Ummah remained committed to standing by its dispossessed Palestinian brethren, whose prolonged suffering was particularly painful, as it had throughout the continuing Israeli reign of terror, until a final settlement was reached that would permit them to return to their homeland with dignity. The legitimate Palestinian struggle for self-determination and freedom from foreign occupation also enjoyed the support of the international community, as evinced at the eleventh Islamic Summit in Dakar, and the thirty-fifth session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in Kampala.

36. He expressed appreciation for the significant contributions made by UNRWA and the host countries over several decades and urged the international community to provide additional assistance to Palestine refugees. Stressing the centrality of a just resolution of the refugee issue in the peace process, the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference called for the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on international law and relevant United Nations resolutions that provided for complete Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and the Palestinian people's right to exercise self-determination in a sovereign and viable State of Palestine within the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

37. **Mr. Ould Hadrami** (Observer for Mauritania), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said that despite the many promises that had been made and resolutions that had been adopted in the 60 years since the Palestinian people had been violently dispossessed of its homeland, subjected to brutal killings and forced into exile, no solution to its plight had been found. While General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which had been imposed by the colonial forces that had held sway in the Organization at the time, had provided for the partition of Palestine into one Arab and one Jewish State, the State of Palestine had not yet seen the light of day. Over the years, in the face of ever greater adversity and, in particular, since the Israeli occupation began, the Palestinian people had remained committed to the preservation of its inalienable rights, including the right to return, and to the establishment of an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

38. Such illegal Israeli policies as the construction of the separation wall and settlements on occupied Palestinian land were a manifestation of the occupying Power's expansionist aims, which had undermined all peace initiatives aimed at a just and lasting two-State solution on the basis of secure, pre-1967 borders. In fact, Israel had rejected such initiatives, including the

2002 Arab Peace Initiative. In addition, the destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure, mass imprisonment and collective punishment measures against residents of Gaza, all of which were measures intended to bring the Palestinian people to its knees, made daily survival in the Occupied Territory increasingly difficult.

39. Israel must cease its violations of international law and abandon its expansionist designs in order to make a just and lasting peace in the region possible. It was also necessary for the international community to compel Israel, as the occupying Power, to comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions and fulfil its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, in addition to accepting the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Furthermore, Israel must bear its responsibility for the plight of Palestine refugees by recognizing their right to return and withdrawing from all territories it had occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem.

40. The United Nations had initially caused the Palestinian tragedy and must therefore take seriously its duty to atone for that tragedy and achieve peace and security for the Palestinian people. Despite the historic injustice of the Nakba, the legitimate national struggle waged by the Palestine Liberation Organization had enabled the Palestinian people, which had remained firm in its collective resolve, to preserve its national identity and realize its rights.

41. **Ms. Ziade** (Observer for Lebanon) said that in the 60 years since the Palestinian Nakba, the United Nations had adopted a series of resolutions condemning tyrannical Israeli practices and all forms of settlement, protecting the unique status of Jerusalem and addressing the refugee problem. Despite the passage of time, the tragedy continued to affect Palestinians living in the Occupied Territory, because Israel persisted in imposing a de facto policy based on the logic of force which ignored the provisions of international law and resolutions of international legitimacy. Israeli practices informed by that policy included imposition of a blockade against the 1.5 million residents of the Gaza Strip, which amounted to collective punishment; construction of the separation wall and settlements; and displacement of Palestinians, who were denied the right to pursue an education and whose officials, jailed in Israel, had been arbitrarily exiled. In addition, taxes due to the Palestinian authorities were diverted to Israeli coffers.

42. In contravention of the obligations established under the Road Map and the outcome of the Annapolis Conference, the Israeli Ministry of the Interior had recently announced its decision to proceed with construction of 1,300 residential units for settlers in East Jerusalem, bringing the total number of such units on Palestinian land in East Jerusalem to 3,300. That decision had been denounced as in contravention of international law by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and described as problematic by United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who had expressed concern that the Israeli resolution on settlements might have a negative impact on Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

43. Despite the many international resolutions and summits that had affirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, little had been done to promote the exercise of those rights or to compel Israel to bear its responsibilities in that regard. The mandate of UNRWA, which had initially been established as a provisional body, only to become a permanent fixture on the regional political scene, had yet to be completely fulfilled.

44. Lebanese-Palestinian relations, which had been marred by a great deal of confusion and tension over the past 40 years, had undergone a fundamental transformation since the 2005 Lebanese Government initiative to mend them on the basis of respect for Lebanese independence, sovereignty and authority over all its territory; compliance with established laws; and the safeguarding of the social and economic rights of refugees until they could return to Palestine.

45. Some 400,000 Palestine refugees were currently living in 12 camps run by UNRWA in coordination with the Lebanese authorities. The clash in 2007 between the Lebanese Army and the terrorist group Fatah al-Islam in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp had drawn international attention to the camp and had come close to destabilizing the country. The Nahr al-Bared conflict had in no way been a Lebanese-Palestinian confrontation but, rather, a coordinated Lebanese-Palestinian effort to combat terrorist acts perpetrated by a faction of criminal killers. Collaborative efforts to rebuild the camp and relocate the refugees were also under way.

46. Her Government hoped that the international community would contribute to the donor conference for the reconstruction of the Nahr al-Bared camp that

would be held in Vienna in June 2008. Progress must be achieved towards a just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on complete Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Arab Territory, the establishment of a Palestinian State and the return of Palestine refugees to their homes, all of which would contribute to the resolution of regional crises.

47. **Mr. Zainuddin** (Malaysia), associating himself with the statements made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said that it was tragic that 60 years earlier, a nation had rejoiced at the birth of its State at the expense of the Palestinian people, the displacement and dispossession of which had caused it tremendous suffering and anguish ever since. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories in 1967 had reinforced the sense of despair. However, the Palestinian people had endured, with its resolve, aspirations and culture intact, despite the occupying Power's efforts to break its spirit. He reiterated his Government's solidarity with and support for the Palestinian people and its cause, which the international community must continue to address. The Committee's work was essential in that regard.

48. The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, which represented the longest occupation in modern history, was no longer sustainable; indeed, a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestine question must be reached forthwith if regional peace was to be achieved. It was galling that the dispossession and human rights abuses inflicted upon the Palestinians did not seem to have stirred the conscience of those who had the will, means and power to alleviate their suffering by helping to resolve the conflict. Those same parties would surely have hastened to redress such injustices, had they befallen a different group of people. It was incumbent upon the international community and the major powers, in particular, to address the untenable situation of the more than 4 million Palestine refugees worldwide.

49. His delegation, which had attended the Annapolis Conference in November 2007, remained hopeful that an independent and sovereign Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, would be created, despite the relentless onslaughts of the Israeli occupation regime and the economic strangulation of the Occupied Territory. While the recent ceasefire was a step in the right direction, it must be accompanied by the cessation of Israeli annexation of Arab lands, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

50. His delegation commended UNRWA for its provision of humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees in the Occupied Territory and neighbouring host countries, and also lauded the sustained efforts made by those countries to alleviate the refugees' plight.

51. **Mr. İlkin** (Turkey) said that for 60 years, the world had been witnessing the deteriorating living conditions and declining sources of livelihood of Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Territory and neighbouring host countries. Some 80 per cent of Gazans were currently dependent on food rations provided by UNRWA and the World Food Programme, while the construction of the separation wall and the ever-expanding settlements in the West Bank had caused Palestinians living there a great deal of suffering. Those grim realities reminded the international community of its responsibility to put an end to the plight of Palestine refugees by bringing about a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the conflict, lest its political, socio-economic and psychological toll on innocent persons should continue to grow. Both Palestinians and Israelis must be able to feel secure from attacks and counter-attacks. As the peace process could only succeed if talks were held in a peaceful environment, his delegation welcomed the recently announced ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and Israel and hoped that it would hold.

52. His Government would continue to support efforts to reach a two-State settlement, while maintaining its regular flow of humanitarian assistance to Palestine. It had also pledged $150 million for the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan at the International Donors Conference in December 2007 and contributed to the reconstruction of the Nahr al-Bared camp in Lebanon. Furthermore, Industry for Peace projects, which brought together private sector representatives from Turkey, Palestine and Israel, would create important employment opportunities for the Palestinians. In conclusion, he commended the long-standing commitment shown by UNRWA to providing assistance to Palestine refugees.

53. **Mr. Natalegawa** (Indonesia), associating himself with the statements made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, pointed out that it was vital, after decades of suffering and loss inflicted upon Palestinians, particularly those who remained refugees, to find a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the conflict. The international community must devote more attention to the plight of Palestine refugees; in that regard, his delegation continued to attach great importance to the work of the Committee, and it also expressed appreciation for the vital assistance provided by UNRWA to Palestine refugees. A durable solution to the refugee issue would both be dependant on and help bring about a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians and throughout the region.

54. The international community should redouble its collective efforts to realize the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, and to promote the rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to self-determination and the right of Palestine refugees to return to their homes, on the basis of the relevant international laws and resolutions, the Madrid principles, the land for peace formula and the Arab Peace Initiative. Given that building a viable Palestinian economy, with the support of the international community, was a fundamental element of the efforts to achieve a durable peace in the region, his Government, along with the Government of South Africa, would convene a Ministerial Conference on Capacity-Building for Palestine in Jakarta on 14 and 15 July 2008.

55. **Mr. Mahmassani** (Observer for the League of Arab States) said that 60 years after the Nakba, the situation of over 4.5 million Palestine refugees continued to deteriorate as a result of Israeli attacks and occupation of Arab lands. The question of Palestine refugees was a just, legal and humanitarian issue that the United Nations and the international community had the responsibility to address. As noted by Count Bernadotte, the late United Nations mediator, in his report of 16 September 1948 to the General Assembly, any settlement of the Palestine question that did not include recognition of the right of refugees to return to their homes would not be just and complete.

56. Having itself been established on the basis of a General Assembly resolution, Israel was obligated to implement General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which resolved that refugees who wished to return to their homes should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date. After 60 years, that date had not yet come. The strong ties that bound the legal rights of Palestine refugees to their land, heritage and civilization could not be overlooked. Those rights, which must not be relinquished, included the right to self-determination, the right to establish a Palestinian State on their land with East Jerusalem as its capital, the right to individual property ownership, the right to return and the right to sovereignty over Palestinian territory.

57. Resolving the refugee question would play a fundamental role in ending the Arab-Israeli conflict and creating peace, security and stability in the region. On the other hand, continued Israeli construction and expansion of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory posed a threat to the peace process and would have grave repercussions on the region. The international community therefore called upon Israel to put an end to its illegal practices, fulfil the obligations stipulated at the Annapolis Conference and salvage the peace process.

58. **Ms. Rodriguez** (Mexico) said that the assistance provided to Palestine refugees by UNRWA over the years had helped to avert an even greater humanitarian catastrophe. While the dispossession and destitution of Palestine refugees was an eminently humanitarian problem, that problem was entangled in a complex political situation, hence the need for measures that would allow for a comprehensive and sustainable solution for the entire region. The situation in the Occupied Territory, recently described as serious by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, had a negative impact on both the peace process and the refugee question.

59. Her Government reiterated that it was essential for both parties to abide by international law and international humanitarian law, along with the relevant Security Council resolutions, if the refugee question were to be resolved. It also reaffirmed its solidarity with the Palestinian cause and expressed its continued support for the peace process and all related international efforts aimed at a comprehensive settlement of the conflict that recognized the right to exist of both the State of Israel and a politically and economically viable State of Palestine, coexisting in harmony within secure and internationally recognized borders. Such a settlement must also recognize that the

Palestinian people must exercise their inalienable rights and, in particular, the rights to self-determination and return.

60. **Ms. Rubiales de Chamorro** (Observer for Nicaragua), associating herself with the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that after the United Nations partition of Palestine, the Palestinian people had fallen victim to an Israeli expansionist campaign that had violently displaced them from its land, prevented its return and confiscated its property. Sixty years later, some 5 million Palestine refugees living in camps continued to demand their right to return, to reclaim their property and to exercise the rights that had been denied them. However, their refugee status had not spared them from the relentless Israeli military machine, which launched frequent attacks on refugee camps using heavy artillery, causing a high number of casualties and violating the sovereignty of host countries, as in the case of the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres.

61. Israel had demonstrated a flagrant disregard for international law by refusing to redress in any way the historic injustice that had ultimately benefited its own citizens. A just settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a prerequisite to peace and security in the region, and it must be arrived at in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions, which stipulated the Palestine refugees' right to return or to receive adequate compensation; the elimination of illegal settlements and the demolition of the separation wall; the return to pre-1967 borders; the restitution of East Jerusalem and the guarantee of non-aggression. Expressing her Government's solidarity with the Palestinian brethren, she pointed out that the upcoming commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights during the sixty-third General Assembly session would be an ideal occasion for nations to respond to their call for justice.

62. **Mr. Chabar** (Observer for Morocco) said that the special meeting afforded members an additional opportunity to affirm their solidarity with the Palestinian people, which continued to suffer the effects of dispossession, forced displacement and occupation and to be victimized by illegal Israeli practices, including the arbitrary arrest of civilians, confiscation of property, destruction of infrastructure, ongoing construction of the separation wall and of settlements on occupied Palestinian land and intensified ground and air attacks against innocent civilians. Furthermore, the tragic situation faced by 1.5 million Gazans best illustrated the Israeli policy of collective punishment.

63. His Government expressed concern at Israeli attempts to alter the demographic, historical, cultural and religious characteristics of Al-Quds, and called upon the international community to adopt a firm stance on the preservation of the legal status of the holy city and avoid measures aimed at imposing a fait accompli on the ground. All such actions fanned the flames of violence and instability, as did the Israeli pursuit of occupation and expansion, which could ultimately undermine the peace process and the prospect of Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation.

64. The positive momentum fostered by the Annapolis Conference could yet be harnessed in order to initiate a new phase of normalization that would, in turn, be conducive to intensive negotiations on final status issues, including the question of Palestine refugees and their inalienable rights, which must be fully addressed in any final settlement, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and other relevant resolutions.

65. As a member of the Arab Peace Initiative follow-up committee, his Government had been an active participant at the Annapolis Conference, and intended to continue working towards peace, in accordance with all resolutions of international legitimacy, the Road Map, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. Reiterating his delegation's support for the peaceful coexistence of the State of Israel and a viable State of Palestine within pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, he expressed admiration for and solidarity with the Palestinian people, particularly the refugees, and he also commended the efforts made by UNRWA and all other bodies mandated to provide assistance to Palestine refugees.

66. **Mr. Al-Allaf** (Observer for Jordan), associating himself with the statements made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the representative of the League of Arab States, said that his delegation had come in order to remind the United Nations and the international community of their moral and humanitarian responsibility towards the Palestinian

people, whose 60 years of suffering caused by dispossession and displacement had been chronicled in the annals of history and engraved in the hearts of all Arabs. As Palestine's next door neighbour, the Government of Jordan had always relied upon resolutions of international legitimacy in its attempts to enable Palestinians to exercise their full national rights within an independent Palestinian State on Palestinian land. The relationship between the two peoples had been built on their region's identity as the cradle of the three divinely revealed religions, which advocated such common humanitarian values as mercy, justice and respect for individual and collective human rights and dignity. In fact, it was those very values that prevented his country from passively bearing witness to Palestinian suffering. In that regard, his Government's policy was based on the principles of adherence to international resolutions and support for the Palestinian people's struggle for its land and freedom.

67. The plight of the refugees was one of the most important issues in final status negotiations between the two parties, and it was also a matter of immediate concern to Jordan, which was hosting some 1.8 million Palestine refugees, namely, 42 per cent of all refugees registered with UNRWA, in addition to 600,000 additional refugees displaced by the 1967 war. Furthermore, his Government, already facing a budget deficit, was bearing a tremendous financial burden as a result of its provision of social services to refugees.

68. Jordan had always emphasized the importance to achieving a lasting peace of finding a just solution to the refugee question based on the relevant international resolutions, particularly General Assembly resolution 194 (III). With regard to the 1967 refugees, various international instruments, including the Jordan-Israeli peace treaty, the Oslo Declaration of Principles and Security Council resolution 237 (1967), called upon Israel to facilitate their return to a State of Palestine to be established in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

69. Until a just solution to the refugee issue was found, UNRWA would remain crucial in the region, particularly in respect of improving refugees' living standards and providing humanitarian assistance and social services. The international community must therefore continue to contribute to the Agency's activities. The Government and people of Jordan warmly welcomed the efforts exerted by UNRWA and would continue to extend to it all necessary forms of support.

70. Given the current difficulties in the region, it was imperative that the international community should work together and seize the opportunity to reach a comprehensive settlement and establish a viable, independent and sovereign State of Palestine, living alongside Israel in peace.

71. **Mr. Taleb** (Observer for the Syrian Arab Republic), associating himself with the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, pointed out that the Palestine crisis had been on the United Nations agenda since the Organization was founded. However, Israel, the legitimacy of which as a State stemmed from a General Assembly resolution, refused to put an end to the Palestinian, tragedy, habitually flouting resolutions of international legitimacy. Israel continued to prevent the return of refugees to their homes, bringing in all kinds of foreign settlers to seize stolen Palestinian lands and property. Indeed, the occupying Power never failed to remind the world that it held itself above international law.

72. His Government would remain committed to assisting Palestine refugees in every way possible until they were able to return to their homes. The Syrian Arab Republic afforded to Palestine refugees the same rights to free health care, education and access to employment in the public and private sectors as it did to its own citizens, and it had invested significantly in providing them with security, health and food provisions, among other social services.

73. The Palestine refugee question constituted an international political, moral and legal responsibility, hence the need for UNRWA to continue to carry out its mandate until it was completely fulfilled. UNRWA must also expand its donor base in order to enable it to improve the conditions of Palestine refugees, while preserving their inalienable rights, foremost among which has the right of return, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 194 (III). He commended the dedication and self-sacrifice of UNRWA staff in the dangerous circumstances in which they worked.

74. The United Nations must intervene immediately to end the Israeli siege against the Gaza Strip and permit UNRWA to continue providing services and emergency humanitarian assistance to Gazans without hindrance. The Organization must also compel Israel to suspend its daily attacks and its flagrant persecution of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territory, which

amounted to terrorism. A civil society investigation into the crimes committed by the Israeli Government and settlers was necessary in order to hold the perpetrators accountable.

75. **Mr. Daou** (Mali) reaffirmed the active solidarity of the Malian people with the Palestinian people in its heroic struggle against Israeli occupation to create an independent and sovereign Palestinian State within internationally recognized borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. The humanitarian tragedy faced by Palestine refugees challenged the conscience of all humankind and underscored the international community's duty to help alleviate their plight and support the exercise of their inalienable rights; in that connection, both UNRWA and the Committee played an important role. He reiterated his Government's wholehearted commitment to the work of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 12.57 p.m.